

Flag Exhibits

Save the Flags is a project jointly administered by the Michigan State Capitol and the Michigan State Historical Center. The Michigan Capitol Battle Flag Collection now resides in a specially constructed and fully equipped archival storage unit at the Michigan Historical Center in Lansing, Michigan. In this archival storage unit, the temperature, humidity and lighting are kept at an optimum level ensuring the long-term preservation of the collection.

In keeping with the mission of Save The Flags (to preserve and conserve the collection) it is not possible to display each and every flag. The constant display of artifacts runs the risk of damage, especially to textiles. Artifacts and flags may, however, be displayed on a rotating basis, as long as set archival standards are conformed to. At the Michigan Historical Center, we believe we have achieved the best of both worlds—rotating display and conservation.

The flag storage facility has a flag viewing window cut into the wall which is shared by a museum exhibit space. We are able to rotate flags (normally on a monthly basis) in and out of the display area before the viewing window. The flag never leaves the archival storage unit. Each flag has been removed from its original staff and laid on an acid-free Tycore pallet. The pallets, which are stored on acid-free stainless racks, may be drawn from the rack, the acid free paper covering the flag is removed and the pallet is carried to the display window. Special archival lighting has been installed above this flag viewing window. The lighting is activated by visitors wishing to view the flag and on a timer, so the flag is exposed to light very infrequently. Interpretive material, which includes a brief description of the flag and its history, are prepared and displayed along with the flag.

Adjoining the flag storage room is a special exhibit space dedicated to the battle flags. The space was designed to mimic the Capitol military museum where the flags were housed between 1879 and 1908-09. The wall paint matches the original color used in the Capitol military museum, as does the star pattern at the cornice. The space also features a “Roll of Honor” which lists groups, families, schools and individuals who have raised \$1,000 to “adopt” a flag from the collection. A DVD produced by the staff of the Historical Center also features the images of the Civil War flags and quotes associated with the flags and the regiments that bore them into battle. In this area the museum displays pertinent artifacts associated with the flag on display.

Periodically the museum launches larger exhibits featuring the flag collection as was done during the commemoration of the sesquicentennial (the 150th anniversary) of the Civil War. The larger collection is not normally accessible to the general public but special arrangements may be made to view the collection by scheduling a visit to the flag storage unit. If you wish to schedule an appointment, contact the co-chair of Save The Flags at 517/373-5157, or at mvanacker@legislature.mi.gov